

## [Old Morrisania Town]

Reportor: William Wood

Editor: L. Allen

Supervisor: A. Hartog

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About 1800 words.

Note: Mr. T. Emery Sutton, of 430 East 160th Street, Bronx, who related the following reminiscences, desires to maintain anonymity.

### OLD MORRISANIA TOWN

By an old resident, as told to William Wood

Some of the events of fifty, sixty, and even seventy years ago are as fresh in my memory as though they had occurred only yesterday. No doubt I am among the few remaining real old-timers in this part of town. Doctor Condon is another one — the [Jaffsie?] of the Lindbergh case; I went to school with him. I recall such well known people as John L. Sullivan, General Tom Thumb, William Tweed of Tammany Hall, Senator Cauldwell, Judge Hoffman, and many others. I met them; knew many of them personally.

This part of Town, the lower Bronx, was formerly called Morrisania. It ran north to 8th street, now 165th street, and south to Harlem Bridge. On Boston Hill Road the residents were mostly of Irish and American stock. My own people bought property in Morrisania in 1852, about seven years before I was born. They moved here from Henry street, Manhattan, and paid \$500 an acre for land on Wall street, now 165th street, east of Boston

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Road. Our house was built there that same year, at a place called Eltona, and was the only dwelling between Boston Road and Forest Avenue. Now the district is all built up. 2 Mount Morris High School stands on ground of the old Rogers estate, owned by Senator Jason Rogers. His son, Tom married the daughter of Senator Cauldwell, editor and owner of the New York Mercury. Senator Cauldwell owned the Empire Hotel, also, at one time. Jackson Avenue was named after a man of that name who kept a boarding school. The property from Grove Hill (161st street) to Wall street (165th street) was owned by H. P. De Graff, who cut through Trinity Avenue and built houses on it. Before this time there were only vacant lots.

Three streets east of Boston Road were Forest, Union, and Prospect avenues; surrounded by farm lands occupied by such old families as the Williams's and the Chisholms. The territory south of Wall street was known as Woodstock, and was an Irish settlement which in later years produced some of Tammany Hall's leaders. I knew some of them as schoolmates when I attended Melrose School, then situated at what is now 158th street and Third Avenue. Morris High School's annex now stands on the same spot.

My father was born in New York City in 1812. He married in 1833. He conducted a printing house in lower Manhattan, and was a member of Fire Engine #25 at the time of the great fire of 1835. A year after he came to Morrisania, the Union Baseball Club was organized. He was one of the six organizers. The others were: Senator Cauldwell; Ed. Albrow, of the Knickerbocker Fire Insurance Company; Ed. White, of the White estate; John L. Burnett, real estate and insurance agent; and Henry J. Ford, a retired gentleman of English birth. 3 The Unions, as the team was called, played their games at the Triangle, on a lot behind Fisher's coal yard, at what is now 163rd street. About 1868 or 1869 they moved to Tremont and Arthur avenues, and there built the first enclosed baseball grounds. The first game played was for the championship between the Unions and the Brooklyn Mutuals. The home team won. The price of admission was 25¢, and I had the distinction of taking in

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the very first quarter. Ed. Wright was the cashier; I was only a boy at the time. There was no grand stand, only board seats.

The great baseball leagues had not yet been organized, and the only prize awarded a winning club was the ball with which the game had been played. We used to silver these balls and keep them as trophies. They were kept in a large case in Louis Comb's establishment, Morrisania Hall. Thomas E. Sutton was the first president, and Henry J. Ford the first vice-president of the Union Baseball Club.

Our team made trips through the country, as do the big league teams today. Funds to defray expenses were donated by the townspeople, each one of them subscribing according to his inclination, and financial ability. The players used to be gone for two or three weeks at a time. Among the members of the Union team were C. Payne, D. Bickett, A. Abrams, B. Hourigan, T. Beals, and the great George Wright whose brother afterwards managed the Athletics when the leagues were organized.

Among the prominent families who resided in the vicinity of our home in old Morrisania were the Barnes's, De Graff's 4 Pollack's Cauldwell's, Nash's, and Holden's. J. Henry, J. Wood, and a Captain Jones were also well known people. The captain bore a reputation of being a hard man to sail with, although he was pleasant enough as I can remember him. His reputation did not seem to worry him; he often said, "Captain Jones at sea and Captain Jones ashore are two very different men."

The streets in those days were lighted by means of lamps, placed at intervals of two streets apart. The lamplighter, used to make his rounds every evening to light them, and every morning to put them out. Away back in the '60's we had only two cross-streets between here and the Harlem River; 149th and 138th. A Catholic convent occupied the site on 149th street where the Lebanon Hospital now stands. What is now Brook Avenue was formerly a stream of water which ran down from Bronx Park district and emptied itself into the Bronx hills, the channel that connects the Harlem River with the East River; so that

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much of the land here is filled-in ground. Many a time I have fished in that old brook, at 150th street.

Next door to the Morrisania Hall stood our one hotel, at old 5th street and 4th avenue. It was kept by a man named Carpenter. Purdy's grocery store had the town scales, for weighing hay and coal. Our principal newspapers were: the Journal, published by Armstrong, at old 5th street, and the Westchester Times. Our fire engine, Lady Washington No. 1, was the only engine that attended the great fire at Yonkers, in the early '70's. 5 Among the business establishments near the Town Hall were Finnegan's saloon, Dutch Mary's grocery store, Sutton's printing office and an auction house. When the women went shopping, they took the Huckleberry to what is now 130th street; there they boarded the horse drawn cars for downtown.

When I was a boy, and later a young man, my people were quite well-to-do. I was supplied with a reasonable amount of money, and went in for athletic sports; baseball, swimming, wrestling; and especially boxing, at which I was considered proficient. I remember John L. Sullivan. That lad should never have lost to Corbett! His trouble was over-confidence and self-neglect. What a drinker he was! And what a tough man! I remember when Ed. Moran came to this country to fight him. Moran was an Englishman despite his Irish name. Oh, how that boy could box! But he met with an accident, and instead of entering the ring to fight John L., he was taken to a hospital. After he came out, I took boxing lessons from him for 15 months. He taught me all I knew; and I was no slouch. There was one piece of ring generalship he taught me that stood me in good stead later, when I once allowed myself to be persuaded to box a well known and clever professional fighter. It was called the English Swipe, and consisted of a double feint and a swift blow to the jaw. I had learned the Swipe so well that I put my adversary to sleep; I had a wicked punch in those days.

They used to run shows at the Morrisania Hall in the '70's; Kelly and Lewis, and General Tom Thumb. Oh, what a rummy Tom Thumb was! They used to stand him up on the bar, and he would never stop drinking until he fell off — into someone's arms. On show

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nights, they used to rig up a platform along the center aisle. Tom would be dressed up as a rooster. He used to walk along the platform and peck at the women's water-falls — ringlets of hair that hung down the backs of their heads. Some of the women took it good naturedly; other ones were furious—or pretended to be so. At the same hall, the Masons and the Odd Fellows used to hold their dances. There were square dances, the lancers, the waltze's, quadrielles quadrilles, schottishes and polkas. They always wound up with the Virginia Reel.

Nearly all the cops were old-country Irishmen. Big, strong, powerful fellows they were. One day, a man came to the police station and asked for an officer to be sent at once to his house, to quell a disturbance there. The sergeant immediately assigned a big Harp to the job, and he left in company with the stranger. An hour later, the cop returned to the station house and reported to his superior.

“Begorrah” he said, “I thought I could walk fast, but I had to run all the way to keep up with that fellow's strides.”

The stranger was Edward Payson Weston, noted professional walker.

Speaking of Irishmen, I remember one who always complained of rheumatism. He went to Gilmore, the druggist and asked what could be recommended to relieve the pain. Gilmore sold him a box of Brandreth's Pills. For the next two weeks, the Irishman was not seen about town. Finally, he showed up at the drug store and Gilmore asked him how he felt. “Did the pills drive out 7 your rheumatism?”

“They did no such thing! Shure they made me a whole lot worse.”

Gilmore looked astonished. “Did you take two pills three times a day, according to directions?” he asked.

“I took the whole box full as soon as I got home”, replied the Irishman.

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Back in the '80's there were two river steamboats, the Sylvan Dell and the Sewmaka, that used to race each other from Peck Slip up as far as Hell Gate. There they used to separate, the Sylvan Dell running up to 129th street, Harlem, and the Sewmaka continuing on up the East River to the Sound. One day the Sewmaka, loaded with passengers, caught fire. My father, who was superintendent on Wards Island, shouted to the captain to beach her. The skipper called back through a megaphone, "My God, My God, I can't do it".

He did beach her, on North Brothers Island, nose to the shore, a mass of flames. The wind was sweeping her decks from forward towards the stern, where the passengers had run to escape the heat. It was an awful catastrophe. Many were burned alive; and many more, who jumped overboard, were drowned. It is so long ago that I don't recall the actual number of lives lost, but I remember that we were taking dead bodies out of the water for several days. The exact cause of the fire was never determined. August 18, 1938 William Wood, reporter L. Allen, editor A. Hartog, supervisor About 1800 words. Old Morrisania Town By an old resident, as told to William Wood Reporter: William Wood Editor: L. Allen Supervisor: A. Hartog About 1800 words. August 18, 1938 Note: Mr. T. Emery Sutton, of 430 East 160th Street, Bronx, who related the following reminiscences, desires to maintain anonymity. OLD MORRISANIA TOWN By an old resident, as told to William Wood Some of the events of fifty, sixty, and even seventy years ago are as fresh in my memory as though they had occurred only yesterday. No doubt I am among the few remaining real old-timers in this part of town. Doctor Condon is another one - the Jaffsie of the Lindbergh case; I went to school with him. I recall such well known people as John L. Sullivan, General Tom Thumb, William Tweed of Tammany Hall, Senator Cauldwell, Judge Hoffman, and many others. I met them; knew many of them personally. This part of Town, the lower Bronx, was formerly called Morrisania. It ran north to 8th street, now 165th street, and south to Harlem Bridge. On Boston Hill Road the residents were mostly of Irish and American stock. My own people bought property in Morrisania in 1852, about seven years before I was born. 2 They moved here from Henry street, Manhattan, and paid \$500 an acre for land on Wall street, now 165th street, east of Boston Road. Our house was

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